In the early 1990’s, controversy over harvest of old-growth forests led to sweeping changes in management of federal forests in western Washington, Oregon, and northwest California. These changes were prompted by a series of lawsuits in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, which effectively shut down federal timber harvest in the Pacific Northwest. In response, President Clinton convened a summit in Portland, Oregon in 1993. At the summit President Clinton issued a mandate for federal land management and regulatory agencies to work together to develop a plan to resolve the conflict.

Immediately after the summit, a team of scientists and technical experts were convened to conduct an assessment of options (FEMAT 1993). This assessment provided the scientific basis for the Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (ROD; USDA and USDI 1994) to amend Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management planning documents within the range of the northern spotted owl (Strix occidentalis caurina). FEMAT also laid the initial groundwork for monitoring under the Northwest Forest Plan (the Plan).

The ROD, covering 24 million federal acres, put in place a new approach to federal land management. Key components of the ROD included a new set of land use allocations – late successional reserves, matrix, riparian reserves, adaptive management areas, and key watersheds. Plan standards and guidelines provided specific management direction regarding how these land-use allocations were to be managed. In addition, the Plan put in place a variety of strategies and processes to be implemented. These included: adaptive management, an aquatic conservation strategy, late successional reserve and watershed assessments, a survey and manage program, an interagency organization, social and economic mitigation initiatives, and monitoring.

The ROD stated that monitoring is essential and required:

*Monitoring is an essential component of the selected alternative. It ensures that management actions meet the prescribed standards and guidelines and that they comply with applicable laws and policies. Monitoring will provide information to determine if the standards and guidelines are being followed, verify if they are achieving the desired results, and determine if underlying assumptions are sound.*

Judge Dwyer reinforced the importance of monitoring in his 1994 decision declaring the Plan legally acceptable: *Monitoring is central to the [Northwest Forest Plan’s] validity. If it is not funded, or done for any reason, the plan will have to be reconsidered.*

The ROD monitoring plan provided a very general framework to begin development of an interagency monitoring program. It identified key areas to monitor, initial sets of questions, types and scope of monitoring, the need for common protocols and quality assurance, and the need to develop a common design framework. In 1995, the Regional Interagency Executive Committee approved the effectiveness monitoring program plan and initial protocols for implementation monitoring. Approval of the effectiveness monitoring plan led to the formation of technical teams to develop the overall program strategy and design and monitoring protocols for late-successional and old growth forests, northern spotted owls, marbled murrelets, tribal, and watershed condition. Socio-economic monitoring protocols continue to be tested. Biodiversity monitoring may be the most challenging of all and has yet to be developed.

Periodic analysis and interpretation of monitoring data is essential to completing the monitoring task critical to completing the adaptive management cycle. This important step was described in the overall monitoring strategy and approved by the regional interagency executive committee. This 10-year report is the first comprehensive analysis and interpretation of monitoring data since the ROD.
Key elements of the monitoring program which have contributed to its success include:

- Interagency participation and funding
- Intergovernmental and public participation
- Dedicated interagency monitoring team
- Emphasis on scientific credibility
- Reporting – annual and periodic interpretive reports
- Senior staff and executive involvement from beginning to the present

PLENARY SESSION

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